

Team to probe pollution claims

By **BRODIE FARQUHAR**
Star-Tribune staff writer

Local health department workers will team up with state and federal officials to determine what is causing health problems in residents of the Ormsby Road area north of Casper.

Furthermore, the owner of a local bar says she may have to close down to protect the health of herself and her employees.

Bob Harrington, director of the City of Casper-Natrona County Health Department, said a conference call last Friday tied his agency in with state health officials, the state Department of Environmental Quality and the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

"We don't have the expertise, but we'll be doing much of the labor," Harrington said.

The agencies are developing a

standard questionnaire that will be distributed among residents of the area — some of whom suspect their illnesses and symptoms are attributable to the Defense Technology plant on Neosho Road, which manufactures and tests tear gas grenades for sale to police, security and military customers around the world.

Harrington said the questionnaire would not assume anything, but instead be a standard tool of epidemiological research, and that it would develop a body of data that could lead to further inquiries and sampling.

"I understand the EPA and DEQ are going to be taking some water samples from area wells, as well as swipe samples from nearby homes," Harrington said.

Joyce Ackerman of the EPA said she and a technician will be in the area Friday, taking some quick sam-

ples to see if anything registers in the lab.

Neighbors of the Defense Technology plant have been complaining of burning eyes, noses and throats, headaches, nausea and vomiting — all classic and well-known symptoms of exposure to tear gas. Other symptoms, however, such as memory loss, chronic weakness and depressed immune systems, are not generally associated with exposure to tear gas chemistry, agree toxicologists.

Defense Technology employs 82 people in the Casper area — 14 at 9125 Neosho Road, and the rest at its South Loop Avenue facilities just north of Casper.

Harrington said the questionnaire will be out shortly and his staff will seek out as many residents of the areas as possible to gather information for later statistical analysis. He cautioned that epidemiological studies

often do not produce definitive results. "It can be very vague and difficult to draw conclusions," he said.

Harrington said he's been in touch with Mary Stedman, owner of the Northern Dreams bar on Ormsby Road, who complains that she, her family, bar employees and some renters are suffering from inexplicable health problems — vomiting, sore throats, headaches, rashes, blood in urine, ulcers and flu-like symptoms. Stedman said she moved her family away from the area on Friday.

"If officials can't figure out what's going on, I'm going to shut down my bar," Stedman said Tuesday in an interview. She said she didn't want to further risk her family's health, nor the health of employees.

"That's my livelihood, so are all these rentals," Stedman said of the impending closure of her bar and her

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County hears of need for 3rd judge

By **BRODIE FARQUHAR**
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The impact of a third judge, paying the piper for deferred maintenance in the past, and the need to enforce zoning and building regulations were just three of the issues discussed by Natrona County commissioners in budget hearings Wednesday.

Clerk of District Court Gen Tuma explained that an ever-rising case load is likely to result in the addition of a third judge in fiscal year 2001-02, which begins July 1. Tuma's requested budget is rising

to meet this need; from \$778,132 in 2000-01 to \$911,628 in 2001-02.

Commissioner Jon Campbell said that the earliest the state might start looking for a new judge would be October, and that it would be the second half of the next fiscal year that a new judge might be on board. Campbell said the county would hire an expert to advise the county on where and how to find room for a third judge and courtroom in the courthouse.

Tuma said a third judge would drive up many of her line-item expenses, including two additional

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Fisher to leave Salvation Army

By **TOM MORTON**
Star-Tribune staff writer

Salvation Army Capt. Rick Fisher will leave his post at the Casper branch to become the state director of the March of Dimes, he said Wednesday.

Rick Fisher and his wife, Capt. Laurette Fisher, have been co-pastors and directors of the Salvation Army since January 1998.

"We're shifting our call, as it were," he said.

Their last day at the agency, as well as their last day as officers of the Salvation Army, will

sume his new job at the March of Dimes on Friday, while Laurette manages the operations of the Salvation Army until the end of the month, he said.

The national organization has assigned Capts. Keith and Linda Bottjen from Beaverton, Ore., to move to Casper to lead and pastor the agency beginning July 5, Rick Fisher said.

The Fishers had been thinking about this career change since last year, he said.

The Salvation Army, as a military-style organization, decides when and where to relocate its officers. Fisher said

IME

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 im fine of \$50,000.
 ed with a sawed-off shot-
 e four teens allegedly bur-
 d the Pawn King, Bi-Rite
 s Drug Store, Timberline
 ng Goods and Casper
 are between 11:30 p.m.
 y and 12:30 a.m. Monday.
 und 1 a.m., police say,
 lled up a vehicle with gas
 dley Petroleum before a
 tion attendant reportedly
 d one of them get out of
 ssenger side wielding the
 in. The teens then fled the
 ation without paying for
 is and were apprehended
 hat morning in Douglas.
 ter Counts' bond was set
 cuil court on Wednesday,
 at down, saying, "That
 s," punctuating the state-
 with a laugh.
 own didn't respond.
 t when Hurley refused a
 c defender, saying he didn't
 anything and he didn't do
 hing, Brown told him, "This
 t a joke. You're 16 years
 and we're talking about a
 sentence at the Wyoming
 e Penitentiary. You need an
 rney really bad."
 Brown appointed a public
 nder to Hurley's case, and
 hose of his alleged co-con-
 ators as well.
 n a separate case, five teens
 used of assaulting one an-
 er in the Juvenile Detention
 iter, this week appeared be-
 e Brown for an arraignment
 misdemeanor charges.
 Garriott Joseph

objection to the guilty plea, and that as it stands, her son is in the state's custody.

Juvenile Detention Center Clinical Director Patrick Dowling told the judge that supervised probation or another facility other than JDC might be more appropriate for Walters.

He then said that while one teen held a chair in front of a security camera, a couple of the accused teens assaulted the 17-year-old victim.

Walters interjected, "It's more in-depth than that."

He then attempted to justify the assault, saying that after the victim had been "talking trash" about him, he struck the victim once and the victim didn't fight back.

Brown told Walters: "It is not appropriate to assault anyone in our society. Your judgement and sentence will be 30 days with the big boys. You assaulted someone three times. ... If you keep up this sort of stuff, you'll get to know all the prisons."

Walters was recently given a one-month sentence on an unrelated, unknown charge and Brown said it would likely be served in the Natrona County jail, as well. Both sentences will run consecutively, he said.

At that, Garriott said, "Damn. That's crap."

Brown then looked up from writing down Walters' sentence and said, "When you commit an offense while you're already in jail for one, don't expect you'll

POLLUTION: Residents off Ormsby Road affected

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departure from the neighborhood. "I just don't want anybody else to be sick, that's all I'm saying."

A longtime resident of the area, Stedman said her property touches the Defense Technology plant property to the southwest. Stedman said her dog, a bird and her fish are sick, as are her daughters and grandchildren. She said she spent Wednes-

day evening knocking on the doors of 10 neighbors — all of whom have said they're sick, too, and have wondered why.

Dave Dubay, local spokesman for Defense Technology, was out of town this week and could not be contacted for comment about the epidemiological study or the potential closing of the Northern Dreams bar.

Sherill's Lt. Stew Anderson, emergency manager for the

county, said Defense Technology has provided him with a map, showing the location of stored chemicals in its plants, as well as data sheets on additional chemicals that are reportable under federal law. Previously, Anderson noted that Defense Technology had not updated its chemical reporting data since 1998, and had not provided the county emergency management office with a location map of hazardous chemicals.

FISHER

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their superiors that they wanted to stay in Casper for at least another four years and raise their children, but learned in March that they would be reassigned to another city, he said.

So Fisher prepared to resign from the Salvation Army, began hunting for another job, had several offers in the private sector, but wanted to use his talents with community service and nonprofit organizations, he said.

Meanwhile, the March of Dimes — with an annual budget of about \$442,000 — had been looking for a new director after its former director, Betty Momoda, resigned last fall, said Brenda Nunez, chairwoman of the agency's board of directors.

The agency advertised nationally, but wanted someone who knew the area and had nonprofit management experience, Nunez said Wednesday.

"He anolied for it," she said

of Fisher. "He came to us."

The statewide job and its Casper location, Fisher said, fit the call he believes he has from God to stay in the area as well as his mission in life.

"The March of Dimes is about babies," he said, adding that he was a low-birthweight baby himself and owes his life to the agency's research.

As director of the Salvation Army, Fisher saw the long-term effects of birth defects and low-birthweight babies on family issues such as poverty, he said.

"If we can make a difference this early and start out a life on a healthy track it will help alleviate other issues in the future," he said.

Laurette, he said, plans to take a break during the summer and spend time with the family.

They will begin looking for another church, where they both hope to work as lay ministers, he said.

CAEDA

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 miles east of Casper.

Hebe's resignation does not affect those plans, said Howley, who learned of the management changes May 24. "We've been told by American LaFrance to move forward."

The Portland, Ore.-based Freightliner's parent corporation, DaimlerChrysler of Germany, has estimated that the truck maker's losses will approach \$500 million this year.

DaimlerChrysler named executive Rainer Schmuckle to replace Hebe.

Freightliner, the nation's largest truck manufacturer, has laid off thousands of employees and cut production, according to news reports.

But American LaFrance, which has a 50 percent interest in the former Becker Fire Equipment Co., has remained a profitable division of Freightliner, Howley has said.